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SOME ALLUSIONS TO MAGIC IN KAUTILYA'S ARTHAŚĀSTRA

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THROUGH AN INTEREST in magic in general I have been led to undertake an extended study of the subject in early Sanskrit literature. In the course of my research, upon looking through Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra, to see if by chance there might be a mention of magic, I was surprised to find a remarkable number of references to the subject—some of it very black. This is indeed surprising when we consider the fact that this book is a work on the Science of Government written by the Prime Minister of Chandragupta.¹

Throughout the work there are frequent allusions to sorcery, demons, obsessed persons, incantations, witchcraft, etc. To select a few instances: an obsessed person (*upagr̥hīta*) may not make legal agreements;² a plaintiff in a lawsuit, if he is not a Brahman, may, on failure to prove his case, be caused to perform such acts as drive out demons;³ witchcraft employed by a husband to arouse love in a wife or by a lover to win the affections of a maiden is no offence, but the practice must not be indulged in if it is injurious to others.⁴ Special spies may pretend to use witchcraft in an effort to detect criminal tendencies in youths.⁵

The third chapter of the fourth book is headed 'Counter-action

¹ Text, R. Shama Śastri, *Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya*, revised edition, Mysore, 1919. Transl. id. *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, Bangalore, 1915.

² Text, p. 148, l. 13. *upagr̥hīta* here seems to have the sense of obsession by an evil spirit. Transl. p. 188.

³ Text, p. 150, l. 3; tr. p. 191.

⁴ Text, p. 235, l. 17; tr. p. 295.

⁵ Text, p. 212, l. 16; tr. p. 266.

against sudden attacks' (*upanipāta-pratikāraḥ*).⁶ These possible attacks are eight in number and are called 'great perils through divine decree' (*daivāni mahābhayāni*), consisting in fire, flood, plague, famine, rats, tigers, snakes, and demons. In the case of flood, plague, rats, snakes, and demons, magic is used in the following ways:

When the floods come, in addition to the very practical use of planks, bottle-gourds, trunks of trees and canoes, recourse shall be had to ascetics with a knowledge of magic (*māyāyogavidas*), and persons learned in the Vedas shall perform incantations against rain.⁷

In the case of plague, besides the aid of physicians with their medicines and spending the nights in devotion to the gods, ascetics endowed with supernatural powers (*siddhatāpasās*) shall perform auspicious and purificatory ceremonials, cows shall be milked on cremation grounds, and the trunk of a corpse shall be burned. If the disease has attacked the cows a 'half nīrājana' (*ardhanīrājana*) should be performed in the cow stalls. This swinging of lights was apparently for the purpose of placating the demons causing disease in the cattle.⁸

In danger from rats, beside the resorting to poison, auspicious ceremonials by magicians may be employed.⁹ These magical performances are unfortunately not described.

In the case of snakes, those persons having a knowledge of poisons shall proceed with *mantras* and herbs, or there may be employed the very practical means of assembling and killing the snakes (*sambhūya vopa sarpān hanyuḥ*).¹⁰ Also those who are learned in the Atharvaveda may perform auspicious rites.¹¹ The reader who is familiar with the Atharvaveda will recall the incantation hymns against snakes.¹²

In danger from demons, experts in magic and those acquainted with the Atharvaveda shall perform demon-destroying rites

⁶ Text, p. 207; tr. p. 261.

⁷ Text, p. 208, l. 2; tr. p. 262.

⁸ Text, p. 208, l. 9; tr. p. 262.

⁹ Text, p. 209, l. 1; tr. p. 262.

¹⁰ Text, p. 209, l. 16; tr. p. 263. The text seems dubious and may be corrupt.

¹¹ Text, p. 210, l. 1; tr. p. 262.

¹² Av. 10. 4; 7. 56; 6. 56; 6. 12; 5. 13.

(*rakṣoghnāni karmāni*).¹³ To ward off demoniacal influences special acts of worship at a shrine (*caitya-pūjāḥ*) should be performed at the changes of the moon, with an offering of a goat, a banner, an umbrella, and something which seems to be some kind of representation of a hand.¹⁴ Also the incantation, which begins *vaś carāmaḥ* ('we worship you'), should continually be performed.¹⁵ I have not been able to identify the quotation indicated by this catch-phrase, *vaś*, etc. At the end of this chapter it is stated that those who are experts in magical arts and have supernatural powers should be honored by the king and caused to dwell in his kingdom.

The fourteenth book contains the principal magic of the whole work.¹⁶ This book is divided into four chapters. The first, entitled 'Means of injuring an enemy', is composed mainly of formulas for the use of materials which, when burned, will cause smoke that is poisonous to men and beasts, bringing either death or disease. From the ingredients I should judge these devices would do all claimed for them. With these poison-gas recipes there are also two or three rather magical-sounding suggestions, but this chapter mainly contains purely material devices to be employed.

The second chapter of this book has all sorts of formulas for deceiving the enemy.¹⁷ Some of them would probably succeed but there is doubt about the others. The idea seems to be to cause the enemy to believe that his opponent has great magical power. There is a paste to turn the hair white and one to turn the body black; mixtures to rub on the body which can be set fire to without burning the skin; oil to put on the feet so that a man may walk over hot coals without being burned; the method of making a ball, with fire inside, which can be put in the mouth and cause a man to seem to be breathing out fire and smoke; one may walk fifty yojanas unwearied if he wears camel-skin shoes covered with banyan leaves and smeared with the serum of the flesh of an owl and

¹³ Text; p. 210, l. 3; tr. p. 264.

¹⁴ Text, p. 210, l. 4; tr. p. 264.

¹⁵ Text, p. 210, l. 6; tr. p. 264.

¹⁶ Text, p. 410; tr. p. 495.

¹⁷ Text, p. 414; tr. p. 500.

a vulture. Also, one can prevent any other fire burning in a certain place by producing a fire in the following manner: by the friction of a black-and-white bamboo stick on the rib bone of the left side of a man who has been slain with a sword or impaled, or by rubbing a human bone on the rib bone of another man or woman. This fire must then be circumambulated three times from right to left as is usual in black magic.¹⁸ At the end of this chapter the author says one may bring about peace by causing fear in the enemy through exhibiting these marvels which he has mentioned.

The third chapter in the fourteenth book is pure, unmixed magic.¹⁹ In order to see clearly in the dark the following method should be used: Having taken the left and the right eye of a cat, a camel, a wolf, a boar, a porcupine, a *vāguli*, a *naptṛkā* (some kind of night-bird) and an owl, or of one or two or many such nightroving animals, one should make two kinds of powder. Then having anointed his right eye with the powder from the left eyes and his left eye with the powder from the right eyes he can see in the darkest night.²⁰

Or if invisibility is desired, having fasted three nights one should, on the day of the star Pushya, sprinkle with the milk of goats and sheep, barley planted in soil placed in the skull of a man who has been killed by a sword or has been impaled. Then, having put on a garland of the barley which sprouts from this, he may walk invisible.²¹

The skin of a snake filled with the ashes of a man bitten by a snake will cause beasts to be invisible.²²

There are five sets of *mantras* in this chapter, to be used in connection with certain of the magical performances, and the names of many demons are called upon. There is much preparation to be made before the use of the *mantras*. For example, having fasted for three nights one should, on the dark fourteenth day of the month of the star Pushya, purchase from a woman of an outcast tribe some fingernails. Then,

¹⁸ Text, p. 418, l. 1; tr. p. 504.

¹⁹ Text, p. 418; tr. p. 505.

²⁰ Text, p. 418; l. 11; tr. p. 505.

²¹ Text, p. 418, l. 17; tr. p. 505.

²² Text, p. 419, l. 14; tr. p. 506.

together with some beans, having kept them unmixed in a basket, one should bury them in the cremation grounds. Having dug them up on the second fourteenth day, and having pounded them up with aloes, one should make little pills. Wherever one of the pills is thrown, after chanting the *mantra*, all will sleep.²³

The aims of the other magical formulas with *mantras* attached are: to cause a door to open of itself, to cause a cart drawn by bullocks to appear and to take the invoker travelling through the sky, to cut a bowstring without touching it.

A different method of procedure is used in the following rite: when the image of an enemy is bathed in the bile of a brown cow which has been killed with a sword on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month, the enemy becomes blind.²⁴

The ingredients mentioned in some of the formulas are almost equal to those of Macbeth's witches. If the nail of the little finger, some part of the nimb tree and of the mango tree, honey, the hair of a monkey, and the bone of a man, are wrapped in the garment of a dead man and are buried in the house of a certain man or are walked over by him, that man, his wife and children and his wealth will not last three fortnights.²⁵

This chapter ends with the statement that one should by means of *mantras* and medicines protect one's own people and do injury to those of the enemy.

Evidently the enemy was expected to use some of the same methods, for the fourth and last chapter of the fourteenth book is composed of antidotes for poisons employed by him.

The magic in this work seems to me to be of enough interest and importance to lead one to go into it more deeply in connection with the magic contained in the better known Sanskrit literature, and this I hope to do.

²³ Text, p. 420, l. 12; tr. p. 507. In this connection cf. RV. 7. 55.

²⁴ Text, p. 423, l. 11; tr. p. 510.

²⁵ Text, p. 423, l. 18; tr. p. 510.